



Episode 1: Pure Understanding with Kathleen Misquitta

Pure Understanding

What I wish I knew before having a baby.

Tiffany: Hi everyone, this is our very first episode of Pure Parenthood! A bit about me to start with. I'm a mother of three teenagers, a qualified myotherapist, personal trainer and infant massage instructor.

Each week I'll be bringing expert information and advice on a range of different parenting topics from industry leaders, within their area of expertise. Our guest today is Kathleen Misquitta, who is the registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science in nursing, specialising in maternity and neonatal nursing. She's also a mother to a lively toddler with baby number 2 on the way.

Kathleen has also been a valued team member at Purebaby for the last few years. Today we'll be discussing what I wish I knew before having my first baby. Hi Kathleen, thanks for coming on today!

Kathleen: Hi Tiffany, thank you so much for having me.

Tiffany: It's such a pleasure. As a parent myself looking back, I often wish I could go back in time and tell my younger self a few things about what I really needed to know before becoming a parent for the first time. I'm sure you felt that way at times as well Kathleen, over the last year or so.

Kathleen: Absolutely I felt that way with my own toddler yes.

Tiffany: Did you find that your nursing experience and knowledge helped you as a parent? I think that definitely would have helped me with a few things.

Kathleen: Yes, it definitely helped with some of the practical and medical aspects, but once he was born, I quickly realised there was so much I didn't know or wasn't prepared for as well as I could have been, and I'm still learning along the way.

Tiffany: Yeah, I think we're all learning on this parenthood journey. I have three teens so I'm constantly learning! So today I'd love to chat with you more about I guess what you think first time parents should know before they have their first baby, from both and mother's perspective and nursing perspective.



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Kathleen: Yeah wonderful, sure thing.

Tiffany: Okay, so let's get started. What is the first and most important need to know for some of the parents out there listening and to start this incredible parenting journey?

Kathleen: Well this sounds very simple, but I would say first and foremost to just be kind to yourself because that good self-care will really help you in getting through those precious first few months in the newborn period that can be a bit overwhelming at times. It's really important for women to remember during this journey, that many of you will have the same joys, struggles, fears and anxieties at the start. So, remember you're not alone and never feel ashamed or weak to ask for help from friends and family. Often times that little bit of extra help is just the key to your physical and emotional well-being. I know for myself simple thing at the end of every day when my son was first born I just had a little 10 to 15 minute hot shower it was time to myself to reset, rejuvenate and relax and it was so vital but so simple at the same time and I just highly recommend that little bit of self-care in those first few months. What about you Tiffany? What was your experience after the birth of your own children?

Tiffany: Yeah, I definitely struggled with allowing myself to create time for self-care. I wasn't told much about this and the importance of it before becoming a parent at all. I think over the years I've learnt to do some things for myself such as having a shower in peace, as you just said, which is a great one. I found that taking a brief walk in nature or doing some gardening of some sort can be very grounding for me literally like getting my hands in the soil I think is such a great thing for me. Did you find with all your nursing experience, specifically in the maternity and neonatal areas, helped you cope better than the average first-time parent?

Kathleen: Yeah, I mean, a little bit, but I would even myself with the 12 years of nursing experience I was still reaching out to those friends who were really well seasoned mothers with that invaluable life experience.



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Tiffany: Yeah true, I think talking to others who have been there, done that can really help and you can work out what's normal and what's not normal. This is really important too because sometimes you can feel very alone with some things, so knowing what's normal and what's not can be really helpful. So, what would be your second piece of advice for first time parents out there today?

Kathleen: Well I can't underestimate the importance of just talking to your partner or support person about your goals and expectations before the baby arrives. You want to ask yourself how will life change once the baby arrives? Who will you reach out to for help when you need? You want to ask how will going back to work change things for us? Will we need childcare? What about overnight help for the baby? Keeping that communication with your partner open is so important and also just understanding that your marriage or relationship will change after the baby arrives. I think it's really healthy for couples to just sit and discuss how you can set aside some time for yourselves maybe once a week, if possible, just to nurture your marriage at the start of your parenthood journey. I mean it can be something very simple but just something to look forward to for yourselves once a week. In my own personal experience I would say was really lucky to have my husband home with me for those initial four weeks after my delivery and that really helped, but we actually didn't sit down and discuss these other questions ahead of time and I wish we would have because we actually needed a lot more help than we anticipated. We ended up reaching out to my mother in law once a week and using a childcare facility once a week as well. It took us a little while to get into the groove of things with our marriage too, but finally we designated Saturday nights for our little take out dinner and movie night, and that was just our way of nurturing our marriage and relationship. It was just something simple to look forward to every week after we put our son to sleep, so I highly recommend you doing that for yourselves.

Tiffany: Yeah that's a great one, I love that. I didn't do any of these things and I think that would have helped my marriage so much at that time and I think that's such great advice. Hopefully all the listeners and parents to be out there will really take that on board, because I think that's something that's often forgotten about and we don't really give enough thought. So, what are your thoughts about being realistic about your birth plan? I think that's another thing a lot of people have in their mind "I want it to be like this". What was your own birth experience like?



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Tiffany: (cont...) How do you think it's best to prepare yourself with coming into that birth and coming into creating a birth plan for yourself?

Kathleen: Yes I would say the best advice I can give is being open minded and flexible, which in this day and age may not always be easy because women are so educated nowadays and that's a wonderful thing. But, if you're open minded and flexible regarding the birth itself and those initial few months it's really important, because often times your birth experience and the new schedule that you have will be dictated by your baby and all babies are a little bit different. So I would say it's okay to have that birth plan, it's excellent to be educated about your options while you're in hospital but also very important to keep that open mind and remember that yours and the baby's health and safety should be the end goal to any plan.

And I would say I mean in my own my own personal experience with my first son it was very different from what I expected it to be. I did have that nursing knowledge, I was very fit in pregnancy, I did my Pilates and I planned for a vaginal birth, but I actually ended up with a 2 day labour, an infection and a c-section, and still the end result was a healthy baby and a healthy mom and recovery thankfully. But it did take me a few days to come to terms as it wasn't what I had planned for, but the end result was still healthy mum, healthy baby and I was thankful and at peace for that in the end. What about you Tiffany? What were your birth experiences like? Were they different from what you expected with your own children?

Tiffany: Yeah, well my three birth experiences were all different like they were just not what I expected at all really and I think similar to you, you know they all had some type of intervention, not to the extent that you had but definitely some form of intervention with all of my births. I still managed to integrate some things into either the labour or the births that I still wanted to include, so I was quite lucky and one of the lucky ones I think in that regard and I think there's lots of things we need to be like you said open minded about because you don't know what's going to happen on the day, so definitely being open minded that's a great piece of advice there.



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Tiffaney: So, do you think that there should be more information given with regards to how your body might feel after birth? Because I felt that after giving birth to my first baby, I really didn't expect a lot of the things that that I felt or that happened, and I didn't know what was normal and wasn't so normal. So, do you think that having more information given to you prior to your birth might be really useful?

Kathleen: Yes absolutely. I think women need to expect to feel sore in those first few weeks while you're bouncing back after your delivery, so I would say again be kind to yourself, try to keep as comfortable as you can, I think it's such a nice idea just take a few comfy and cute items out of your maternity wardrobe, set those aside for postpartum and wear those things while you're getting back into shape in those first few weeks, because it takes a few weeks at least for those fluids to leave your body from the pregnancy.

It's important for you to be comfortable. So, for me it was kind of an all-black wardrobe, cotton, soft and stretchy and that really helped me. I would say for women who are expecting to have a vaginal delivery, you can expect quite a lot of swelling depending on the amount of time you push. You expect swelling in your perineal area and what you can do for comfort is apply an ice pack with a witch-hazel astringent in the first 24 hours or so following your delivery. That's really going to help decrease the swelling that you have down below in the first day, and then day two and three following your delivery you want to speak to your nurse about pain control obviously too, but what you can do in day two and three is use just a warm water rinse to the area.

You can even just use a little warm squirt bottle and that warm water is going to help facilitate blood flow and healing to the area. So, it's just really important and for women who are expecting to have a caesarean section have a chat with your nurse about your pain control because the more you're able to get up and moving and looking after your baby, the better you're going to feel about yourself in those days following the delivery. A little bit of light walking as soon as it's safe is really helpful. So, I would say yeah, that discussion with your nurse about pain control is really important and just trying to get up and moving with your light walking and care of your baby as soon as it's safe for you.



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Kathleen: (cont...) Try also to rest while your baby is resting, that will also help in your recovery. Now whether you've had a caesarean or a vaginal delivery, you want to drink lots of water because that's going to help replenish and boost up your blood volume and help establish your milk supply.

A common complaint in the postpartum period is constipation. So, what you can do is take a stool softener, you can increase your fibre intake, you can also increase your water intake and walk. Those will all help in relieving that feeling of constipation or preventing it. Lastly, I would tell women to just expect to feel those highs and lows due to hormone fluctuations, especially on day three to four postpartum. This is a really good time for you to limit your visitors and just get plenty of rest. I know I had to be told this even myself I was in that day three to four mark and very teary and my nurse said that's okay you know this is normal with your hormones and it was a really good time for me to just rest.

During this time, what's happening in your body is your oestrogen and progesterone levels will be decreasing and your oxytocin and prolactin levels will be increasing, and fluctuating based on the amount of breastfeeding the babies doing. So, these fluctuations in your hormones cause this unexpected teariness that just comes over you, especially around day three to four postpartum.

Just understand it's extremely normal during this time period. Be kind to yourself, be patient with yourself and remember that your hormones will level out in those weeks that follow your delivery and if you're feeling bluesy beyond that period, there's also plenty of support available to you. Your maternal child health nurse will be assessing you for that.

Tiffany: Yeah there's some great info there for the listeners that's for sure. I remember those few days as well feeling really teary after having my first and thinking "what's wrong with me" so when you mentioned that you had that as well it is really it's so true and it's happened with all of my babies and you kind of forget that that happened.



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Tiffany: So, it's actually great to be reminded of that and to remember how real it is and to expect that because I think again knowing what's normal at least you think "I will remember reading that or hearing that". So, it's so important to understand what your body needs and get the right support whether it be for your body or emotionally. After three births, I know a lot more about it now, but I think that's so great that you've brought that up now. Did you struggle with breastfeeding at all? Because I did with my first definitely but had then some great experiences like my second and third was just it was a breeze, had no issues. So what would be your biggest piece of advice on breastfeeding for the first-time parents?

Kathleen: Yes, so I mean I definitely struggled pushing through the fatigue at the start and I knew that breastfeeding can be very difficult so I would say to all you first time mums again be kind to yourself and just remember there are many different ways to feed your baby. It's also really important to remember that breastfeeding requires a lot of learning at the start from both mum and baby.

So, your baby is used to being fed very passively in the womb over this nine-month period leading up to the birth. The baby is fed via the umbilical cord so the sucking, the swallowing, the latching, the positioning - this is all new for you and the baby and just be patient and give yourself time to learn. Seeking the support of a Lactation Consultant while you're in hospital and then again after you've gone home bad that can be really, really helpful, especially if you're having difficulty with the latching and positioning. Sometimes just that one-hour visit with the Consultant might be all the help you need to really boost up your morale and confidence levels during feedings.

The Lactation Consultants can also really help get you through that initial nipple soreness that you'll experience with your first baby. So, what happens with your first baby this skin will be callusing over time as it's getting used to all of these feelings and all of this stimulation and it will be sore at the start - even if the baby is latching properly. There are creams and gel packs available for comfort, as well as hot and cold packs to kind of help alleviate that breast pain that you may experience whenever your milk fully comes in and you become engorged.



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Kathleen: I'd also add that it's okay if breastfeeding in the traditional sense doesn't work out but if you're not able to latch and position your baby comfortably and you really want your baby to have that breast milk you can purchase or rent a breast pump you can pump the milk, express it and feed the baby in a bottle. Or, if bottle feeding your baby formula exclusively is the right choice for you, that that is okay too. I think feeding your baby is a beautiful time to bond with your so whether your breastfeeding or bottle feeding regardless of what you choose, the end goal is that healthy and happy well-nourished baby.

Tiffaney: Absolutely. I think this is such an important message with regards to breastfeeding because you know, I guess there's a lot of information out there about breastfeeding but I think it's really important to look into it in more detail because I don't think I looked into it nearly enough before having my first. I think if I'd had more information, I might have felt more empowered with that knowledge and made better, and more informed decisions and probably would have felt a lot less guilty when I struggled with breastfeeding and had to stop after a couple of weeks with my first. So, I'm sure that new parents out there listening will really appreciate this advice and I wish I'd learnt more definitely before having my first baby and having her in my arms and having a nurse or Lactation Consultant there with me for the first time and not knowing what to do.

So, I think that this this particular section is just so vital and so great that we've covered today. Do you also have some other tips on how to work out what your why your babies crying and why this is all going on with them? Because I think you know it took me a long time to work out why my baby was crying initially. Can you give us some hot tips on that? Because I think that's definitely an area that everyone struggles with, with their first baby.

Kathleen: Yes absolutely. So, decoding newborn tears. Why is my baby crying? This is such a common question that new parents have, and I would just emphasise first of all to take care of yourself as a parent and try to remain calm but I know it's very difficult. When when my 3-year-old cries now it stresses me out. Ask for help from your loved ones when you need it and you know, yeah, I mean even when your teenagers cry Tiffany I'm sure you just feel very stressed as a parent.

Tiffaney: Yeah, yeah.



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Kathleen: Because you don't want to see your children uncomfortable. So, it's normal. But with newborns I would say crying is a normal part of your newborn's development. So, it's really important for you to understand that it usually peaks around 6 to 8 weeks after birth, and then gradually decreases and this is the way your babies communicating his or her needs. So, it's our job as parents just to try to decode those tears and understand what the baby is asking for. I just have a little list that I would give my patients of what your baby may be feeling while crying.

First of all, I would say ask, could the baby be hungry? So, most newborns eat around every two to three hours, and crying can be a late sign of hunger. So, to prevent those tears, I would say try to observe your baby for those early feeding cues like lip smacking, rooting, hand to mouth movements - act on those early feeding cues to prevent the tears later related to being hungry.

Next, you may ask is my baby tired? So, newborn babies normally sleep around 8 hours in the daytime and then usually around 8 hours at night. Usually they only wake for changing and feeding, so try to observe for sleepy time cues, like rubbing of eyes, yawning before the baby gets to the stage of being very fussy, and tired. Act on those early sleepy time cues if you can and it will prevent tears related to being too tired.

This is a very simple one you may ask is the baby wet or dirty? So, dirty diapers are really common cause of newborn tears. What you can do is try to check the baby's diaper before and after feedings, and that's just going to help prolong comfort levels for your baby.

You may also ask, do you think baby wants to be swaddled or held right now? Now swaddling really makes babies feel secure and it simulates that intrauterine environment, so that's a really lovely way to settle your baby. If you think your baby might want to be held, you can try skin to skin contact, which has a lot of really beautiful physiological benefits for both you as a mother and your baby, so it can help really increase your breast milk, it can help calm you, it can help regulate the baby's body temperature - another beautiful way to settle your baby.



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Kathleen: (cont...) Also, you may ask is baby crying because the baby is too hot or too cold? This simple task of just adding or removing a layer of clothing or a blanket can often really help in improving your baby's comfort level.

And finally, this is a really important one. You could ask is baby over stimulated? So you have to keep in mind that these babies are used to this beautiful, warm, dark quiet space which is the womb for nine months and they then they get out into the hospital environment or your home environment and it tends to be bright, a bit noisy, with a lot of visual stimuli. So, I would say during fussy periods try if you can just keep your baby in a relaxing environment with minimal visual and auditory stimulation.

Tiffaney: Yeah great. Sometimes it can be so difficult to work how well your baby wants and needs so these things are really great to remember. I think if I had been given list like this, that would have helped me a lot. So, I'm sure that everyone listening today will really love the fact that you've listed a few things there. So, what would be the next piece of advice you would offer to someone expecting their first bub, Kathleen?

Kathleen: Yeah so, I would say another really common question new parents have is: How do I know my baby is getting enough to eat? So, newborns often cluster feed during the first several days and they just appear hungry all the time. That's alarming for new parents who are trying to meet all their baby's needs. So, how do you know your baby is getting enough to eat?

So, as health care providers we check your baby's weight and urine output and those are the best indicators in the first weeks of the baby's life. Most health care providers are going to want to see the baby pass urine at least one time in that first 12 to 24 hours of life. Then that urine output will gradually increase by day six of life to around 6 to 8 wet diapers over a 24-hour period. And all of this happens, this increased urine output, will happen over that first week, as moms breast milk also increases.



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Kathleen: (cont...) So, as mum has a good milk supply established hopefully by the end of that first week, then baby will have quite a lot of urine output, which is a really good sign baby is getting enough to eat. Another indicator of adequate hydration is the transition of newborn stool which is called meconium. At birth it's a very black tarry, kind of alarming looking stool, and it will transition after a few days to a greenish colour, and then by about 6 days of life it'll be a yellow seedy stool. This transition of stool also occurs as baby's fluid intake increases, so another really good indicator of adequate hydration in the baby.

Now finally, your healthcare provider will be keeping a very close eye on the baby's weight the first few weeks of life. So, while you're in hospital though probably weigh the baby every day or so, and it's really important for new parents to understand that newborns, healthy full term newborns, normally lose about 5-7% of weight from their birth weight in the first week of life or so, which is normal. Now when the weight drops below 10% of the birth weight, that's the time your healthcare provider may do a detailed assessment to check and see: are baby's nutritional needs being met at this time?

Tiffany: Yeah this is also good to know. I think knowing more about what this this I guess time is going to be like with you know with pooey nappies and whether they're getting enough to eat is so important, because it can alleviate a lot of stresses that you might have in those first few weeks at home with your baby on your own. I felt as though I was constantly feeding my newborn and it was so hard to work out if she was getting enough, and to help me feel like I was doing my job and I didn't know what was going on.

So, yeah and I really struggled with sleep deprivation with my first, so would you have some info that you could share with this in regards to understanding why your baby won't sleep much initially? Because that was definitely an issue for me and my little one.

Kathleen: Yeah, so there's the feedings and the sleeping just go hand in hand, and I know most people do know that some babies just do not sleep much at the start, so a very common question new parents have how much is my baby supposed to sleep? And it's important to understand that there's really no set sleep schedule at the start while you're establishing that feeding schedule.



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Kathleen: (cont...) In general, newborns will sleep about 8 to 9 hours during the daytime and about 8 hours at night, but the majority don't start sleeping through the night until they are at least three months of age, and some will still be waking at night up to a year and beyond. So, those frequent newborn feedings that happen in the first few weeks of life, that's a very common cause of sleepless nights, for both babies and new parents, and that's normal.

This behaviour the newborn exhibits, the back to back to back feedings, it's referred to as cluster feeding. This behaviour stimulates mums milk supply, so the more mum's nipples are stimulated, her hormones in the her body or released to produce more milk and establish an adequate milk supply, and this time period can be extremely exhausting for new parents, but it does get much easier once mum's milk is fully in.

So, outside of that cluster feeding period, most newborns will wake and feed around every three hours. So, what you need to do you need to check with your health care provider based on your baby's needs they will say based on age and weight, how much baby needs to be fed. If your baby is born a little bit pre-term, the baby may need to be fed a little bit more often. So, once that feeding schedule is established with your baby, I would say then it's a really good time to think about trying to incorporate a sleep routine. And singing, reading, massage - these are beautiful ways to spend those few minutes that you have of awake time between feedings and sleep to really help establish that sleep routine with your baby.

Tiffany: Beautiful, beautiful. Thanks, so much for the information, Kathleen, because I think understanding a bit more about cluster feeding, what's actually going on and why they're going to feed so often is so vital, because again, it's going to help people understand what's normal and what's not. So, what would be your final tips here and final things that you'd like to share with everyone today and things that you would have told yourself before starting on your parenthood journey?

Kathleen: Oh, I mean I would tell myself that during this incredibly beautiful time in your life, your body is also experiencing things both physically and emotionally that you've never experienced before. So, I would say give yourself a little break. It's OK not to love every minute of being a new mother, and also say that it does get easier over time.



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Tiffany: Yeah, I think that that's really important and so beneficial to know that all of this stuff that's going on is normal and it's going to happen, and it's OK. Thank you so much for your time today, Kathleen. It's been so insightful and so informative. You have a wealth of knowledge and expertise to offer. I really appreciate your time today so thank you so much.

Kathleen: Yeah, my pleasure, Tiffany. Thank you so much for having me.

Tiffany: I would have loved to have had you there before I had my first baby that's for sure, Kathleen!

Kathleen: Oh, thank you.

Tiffany: Well as soon to be parents out there we hope this episode has shed some light on some of the things that a lot of parents wish they knew before embarking on this incredible parenthood journey.